

# **Collaborative Tourism Planning in Small Municipalities. The Creation of a Local Development Strategy for Pombal (Portugal) Through the Application of the Delphi Tech- nique**

## **O Planeamento Turístico Colaborativo em Municípios de Pequena Dimensão. A Criação de uma Estratégia de Desenvolvimento Lo- cal para Pombal Através da Aplicação da Técnica Delphi**

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### **Abstract/ Resumo**

The tourism planning has been coming to be one of the main tools to overcome the issues generated by tourism and to optimize its benefits for all the parts involved, in an increasingly sustainable and collaborative vision. In Portugal, the local government has been gaining responsibilities in this field. Pombal, a municipality in the coast of the Centre of Portugal, has touristic potentialities, but lacks a structured strategic intervention. In this research, the basis for the tourism development of Pombal is determined through the implementation of the Delphi Technique. The paper highlights the technique as a suitable tool for the implementation of collaborative processes in local and regional contexts, as it enables a heterogeneous group of stakeholders to cross perspectives and to generate solutions together in a neutral and equitable environment.

*Keywords:* Tourism development; Collaborative planning; Destination; Delphi technique; Pombal.

O planeamento turístico tem vindo a constituir-se como uma das principais ferramentas para colmatar os problemas gerados pelo turismo e otimizar os seus benefícios para todas as partes envolvidas, numa visão cada vez mais sustentável e colaborativa. Em Portugal, o poder local tem vindo a ganhar responsabilidades neste âmbito. Pombal, município do litoral do Centro de Portugal, tem potencialidades turísticas, mas carece de uma intervenção estratégica estruturada. Neste estudo, algumas bases para o desenvolvimento turístico de Pombal são apontadas através da implementação da Técnica Delphi. O artigo destaca a técnica enquanto ferramenta adequada para a implementação de processos colaborativos em contextos locais e regionais, visto que permite a um grupo heterogéneo de intervenientes cruzar perspectivas e criar soluções em conjunto num ambiente neutro e equitativo.

*Palavras-chave:* Desenvolvimento turístico; Planeamento colaborativo; destino; Técnica Delphi; Pombal.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Portugal has been asserting itself as a world-wide top destination. In the most recent Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report of WEF, referring to 2018, Portugal was ranked as the 12<sup>th</sup> most competitive national destination in a group of 140 nations (WEF, 2019). As tourism is one of the main economic activities for the development of Portugal, its growth must be sustainable and integrated and, for that to happen, planning is an essential tool.

Tourism planning is a relatively recent concern (starts to gain form at the 1920s but begins to be properly recognized from the 1980s) (Costa, 2001) as the priorities and elements to have a successful destination have been evolving from having the maximum of economic benefits to a more sustainable vision in which preservation of heritage, social wellness, economic profits and other elements are balanced. Besides the evolution of priorities, the process of tourism planning, and of planning in general, has been transitioning from a conceptual and top-down format to a more collaborative, bottom-up and territory-based practice.

Pombal, a municipality localized in the coastal centre of Portugal, has several potentialities for the development of tourism, however, not much has been done in terms of structuration of the activity in the territory. A strategic intervention, based on a process of collaborative planning, for a medium/long term is much needed.

The purpose of this research is to present a set of bases and measures for a future action of structured tourism development in Pombal, through the evaluation of the current circumstances at the destination, the definition and hierarchy of products and resources to explore, a SWOT analysis and the formulation of measures and actions for different issues and time horizons. The outcoming results are based on the application of the Delphi Technique, which enables the confrontation of perspectives between a heterogeneous group of stakeholders (García-Melón, Gómez-Navarro & Acuña-Dutra, 2012) and the creation of knowledge on subjects with less information available (Szpilko, 2014).

## 2. DESTINATIONS AND TOURISM PLANNING: AN EVOLVING PRACTICE

The destination is the territorial element of the tourism system in which most of the activity takes place and where the greatest part of the positive and negative impacts are revealed (Cooper, 2012). As the competitiveness between destinations and the conscience of the negative impacts of tourism are growing, planning has been asserting itself as an essential tool for the sustainable development of destinations and as one of the most important functions of the management body.

The process of planning brings several advantages for the destination: (i) provides a rational basis for the decision making (Inskeep, 1991); (ii) enables the creation of response mechanisms for future events (Morrison, 2013; Vieira, 2007); (iii) identifies opportunities to explore and constraints to prevent (Silva, 2013); (iv) enables a more efficient and sustainable management of the resources (Inskeep, 1991; Mason, 2003); (v) elucidates the functions and hierarchy of the stakeholders at the destination (Inskeep, 1991); (vi) facilitates the integration of other sectors (Mason, 2003), general policies (Inskeep, 1994) and fragmented elements of the tourism activity (Inskeep, 1991; Morrison, 2013; Vieira, 2007) into the strategic vision; (vii) brings more credibility and attention to the activity (Inskeep, 1994); (viii) defines standards to maintain the quality and capacity of the destination at positive levels (Inskeep, 1991; Mason, 2003); and, finally, (iv) the formulation of goals, objectives and guidelines facilitates the evaluation of the performance of the destination and its stakeholders (Cooper, 2012).

Although the most recent developments and concepts are not always implemented, the approach to tourism planning has been evolving. Tourism planning starts to gain shape at the 1920s, as part of general planning actions (Costa, 2001; Henriques, 2003), and, at that time, tourism was perceived as not having negative impacts: a vision commonly known as boosterism (Henriques, 2003). After the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War – second half of the 1940s – the tourism boom occurs: the process of planning

remains less interventionist, in an attempt not to limit the activity growth, and is characterized by a more spatial and economic approach (Howie, 2010; Morrison, 2013; Vieira, 2007). The 1980s are particularly important because the tourism planning starts to be recognized as its own scope, the academy begins to study this theme in more detail and sustainability enters the sphere of concerns in the development of destinations (Costa, 2001; Morrison, 2013). In the 1990s, the sustainable and community well-being-oriented approaches gain some highlight. The growing competitiveness between destinations reaffirms the importance of planning for the success of destinations. The process becomes more strategic, flexible (Howie, 2010), integrated, territory-based (bottom-up vision) and participated (Morrison, 2013).

Following this evolution, the local and regional authorities have been gaining more power and responsibilities in the process of planning and management of tourism (Costa, 2001; Simão and Partidário, 2012), as these agents are being recognized as the basic level for the resolution of problems and for the creation of tools, mechanisms and strategies for the development of tourism (Kapera, 2018).

Silva and Umbelino (2017) argue that “the national plans for the tourism determine the strategic options for the national and regional levels, but need to be accompanied by more detailed plans (...)” (p. 36). Generally, a local or municipal plan for the tourism privileges specific issues as territorial zoning and organization, licensing of tourism activities, marketing and information, definition of target markets and strategic segments, training of human resources and sustainable exploitation of resources (Inskeep, 1991; Silva and Umbelino, 2017; UNWTO, 1998).

Nonetheless, there are a couple of elements that are common to the majority of the strategic plans, regardless of the geographic level. A simple structure of the plan must include: the definition of a vision and main objectives; a diagnostic section, in which a SWOT analysis is usually presented; and the conception of the concrete strategy, with operational actions and programs for several domains (Silva and Umbelino, 2017). More precisely, a tourism plan should address in more or less detail: (i) the vision, mission and main objectives of the strategy; (ii) a synthesis of the intern and external analysis; (iii) the organizational structure and

role of each stakeholder; (iv) brand positioning and priority strategies of promotion; (v) priority products and target markets; (vi) priority axes and respective lines of action; (vii) budget and funding sources; (viii) tools for the implementation of the plan; and (iv) monitoring (Inskeep, 1991; Morrison, 2013; UNWTO, 1998).

## 2.1. Collaborative Planning

As we move from the master plan to a more comprehensive and bottom-up perspective (Howie, 2010), the representatives of the different groups of stakeholders – “groups and individuals with direct or indirect interest on the management of a destination for tourism” (Morrison, 2013, p.23) - must be engaged in the process of planning in order to assure the sustainable development of the destination (Kapera, 2018). On this matter, Lin and Simmons (2017) state that “public participation is considered a cornerstone of sustainable tourism planning” (p.315).

Vogt et al. (2016) claim that “a sense of ownership, buy-in, and control is established in collaborative planning techniques that can sustain implementation over the long term” (p.38). The benefits of applying a collaborative planning are several: (i) the formulation of more creative, adjusted to reality and easier to implement solutions (Mason, 2003; Silva & Umbelino, 2017); (ii) the sharing of ideas and perspectives (Lin & Simmons, 2017; Mason, 2003; Morrison, 2013) between individuals with different backgrounds and interests, which (iii) enables a growing feeling of belonging and responsibility (Del Chiappa et al., 2018; Morrison, 2013) through a more democratic decision-making process (Mason, 2003); (iv) the levels of cooperation between stakeholders during the process of planning and posteriorly are improved (Morrison, 2013); and (v) the local entrepreneurship and dynamism increase (Del Chiappa et al., 2018).

Nonetheless, it must be stated that it is a significant challenge to engage, coordinate and create an environment of collaboration between such a heterogeneous panoply of stakeholders. Jamal and Getz (1995) list six propositions for the success of a participative planning process:

1. Stakeholders must recognize the high level of interdependence between them to make a collaborative effort. Different groups of stakeholders contribute with different kinds of elements – knowledge, network, financial capaci-

ty and others (Soulard et al., 2018) – and have different powers in the dynamic of the destination – coercive, legitimate, induced and competent (Saito & Ruhanen, 2017): to pursue a successful and sustainable development, they must recognize that collaboration is the best option, as each stakeholder brings specific elements to the process.

2. Stakeholders need to be aware of individual and mutual benefits from the process to participate. Stakeholders get involved in the process for different motives (Lin & Simmons, 2017): for example, environmental groups seek to push for greater inclusion of heritage preservation and environmental sustainability issues (Jamal & Getz, 1995), business agents look to increase their profits and improve infrastructures (Lin & Simmons, 2017) and residents seek to maintain or improve their well-being. A collaborative tourism plan must arise from a negotiated and shared decision-making process (Lin & Simmons, 2017) that seeks to answer and balance all these interests.

3. Stakeholders must have the perception that decisions will be implemented. Beyond having the “opportunity to express their opinions” (Soulard et al., 2018, p.193), is important for the stakeholders to feel that they were listened, their interests were considered (Morrison, 2013) and that their contribution will be expressed in the final plan.

4. Several (ideally, all) groups of stakeholders must be included in the process. For stakeholders to accept and act according to the plan, they must feel represented in the process (Soulard et al., 2018). According to Donaldson and Preston (1995, cited by Kapera, 2018), not all stakeholders need to participate in the process of planning, but all interests – groups of stakeholders – must be considered and represented.

5. It must exist a structure/organization which is the ultimate responsible for the management of the destination and that initiates and facilitates the processes between stakeholders (Morrison, 2013; UNWTO, 1998). The balance between leadership and inclusion is crucial (Soulard et al., 2018).

6. The process must be based on the formulation of a common vision, goals and objectives. A destination is formed by stakeholders with complex interdependent relations and different, and even contradictory, interests and goals (Saito & Ruhanen, 2017): the implementation of engagement activities and mechanisms

(Del Chiappa et al., 2018; Lin & Simmons, 2017; UNWTO, 1998) – seminars and public meetings, questionnaires, web forums, focus groups, and others – contribute for the formulation of common bases.

However, there are certain challenges concerning the collaborative approach of tourism planning, namely the hierarchy of powers instituted and perceived between stakeholders (Lin & Simmons, 2017; Mason, 2003; Soulard et al., 2018) and the lack of technical knowledge of a portion of the interested parts (Lin & Simmons, 2017; Soulard et al., 2018; Vogt et al., 2016). In order to remove these barriers in the case study of Pombal, the methodological option fell on the Delphi Technique, with the purpose of suppressing the power hierarchy through the anonymity (De Loë et al., 2016; Geist, 2010), and of enabling a knowledgeable but still heterogeneous group of participants (Ballantyne et al., 2016; Geist, 2010).

### 3. THE MUNICIPALITY OF POMBAL AND THE TOURISM ACTIVITY

Pombal is a municipality of the Centre of Portugal, district of Leiria, which comprises landscapes, in an area of 626 km<sup>2</sup>, that go from the coast to the mountains.

This territory has a great potential for the development of tourism (CMP, 2014; Gonçalves, 2013): in terms of cultural and historical value, there are traces of human presence since the Palaeolithic and several civilizations have passed by (Moors, Romans, Visigoths and others); the Castle of Pombal (12<sup>th</sup> century) was a strategic point for the Christian Reconquest; Pombal is linked to an important national historical figure of the 18<sup>th</sup> century - the Marquis of Pombal; and, as part of some strong traditions and identity heritage, the impact of industry in the territory and the heritage that follows, must be underlined; the diversity, alongside the scenic and scientific value of the landscapes is other added value (in distances of 30 minutes by car, it is possible to reach coastal, rural, urban, mountain and riverside landscapes); other aspects that can be opportunities are the passage of the pilgrimage path of Fátima, the institutional bet on sport events and the scientific value of palaeontological heritage and of some natural extents within the area of Pombal – Mata Nacional do Urso (National Forest of Bear) and Maciço Calcário de Sicó (Limestone Massif of Sicó).

Besides the inherent elements of the territory, the agents and local authority must take advantage of the strategic localization of Pombal: the municipality is located in the midpoint of the route between Lisbon and Oporto (about 170 km of distance from both), the two main cities in Portugal; in a distance of 30/45 minutes by car it is possible to visit several World Heritage Sites classified by UNESCO (Mosteiro da Batalha; Mosteiro de Alcobaça; and Universidade de Coimbra, Alta e Sofia), and one of the most renowned Christian shrines in the world, the Sanctuary of Fátima.

In terms of tourism facilities and services, Pombal is in an initial stage of development. Although there are seven registrations on the National Register of Tourist Animation Agents (RNAAT, 2019) for Pombal, only one of them has an active role in the municipality. Most of the (potential) points of interest are not prepared for tourist demand and interpretation and the few hotel establishments that exist are concentrated in the city of Pombal (SigTur, 2019).

With regard to the demand, Pombal represents 8.47% of the overnight stays in the Inter-municipal Community of Leiria – CIM Leiria (constituted by ten municipalities) and 0.65% of Centre Region overnight stays in 2017, registering 43,607 overnight stays in that year. Pombal is the fourth municipality with the most overnight stays of the CIM Leiria in 2017, only surpassed by: Leiria (49.2%); Marinha Grande (24.5%), a destination known by the beaches and for its industrial activity and heritage; and Batalha (12.4%), home of the Mosteiro da Batalha, a World Heritage Site and one of the most visited attractions in the country. Nevertheless, the growth of demand (expressed by the evolution of the overnight stays) in Pombal has been slow, since the average annual growth between 2014 and 2017 has been of +6.8% while the CIM Leiria registered +9.3% in the same time interval (Turismo Centro de Portugal, 2019).

Another question that must be addressed is the fact that 77.7% of the overnight stays in touristic accommodations in Pombal in 2017 have been domestic/national, while the same group represents 38.4% at a national level (PORDATA, 2019). In terms of international markets, France almost covers half (46.9%) of the demand in Pombal (the return of emigrants in certain points of the year has a great influence in these numbers); other markets with some impact at the destination are Spain, Brazil, UK and Netherlands (PORDATA, 2019).

The main overnight stays motivations, according to local hotel representatives, are: (i) labour reasons - Pombal has an industrial park with some dimension, which enables a demand of workers that spend four/five nights per week in the hotel; (ii) passage tourists – as already mentioned, the localization of Pombal turns it into a stopping point for people that travel between Lisbon and Oporto or want to visit nearby attractions (however this kind of tourist usually limits the visit to the city and is not directed to other points of the destination); (iii) sports teams/athletes – Pombal is growing as a host of national and international sports events of several modalities; (iv) emigrants holidays – this territory has a great emigrant tradition that must be optimized since, in the summer, a large part of this group returns for family events.

In terms of planning, collaboration between entities and structuration of the tourism activity, not much has been done. The existent policy and guidelines are little contributions for major strategies of the territory – Strategic Plan for the City of Pombal (CMP, 1996), Plan of Municipal Director (CMP, 2014), and others - and/or directed to the resolution of other concerns (preservation of historic buildings, for example); besides that, this measures/bases are not formulated in a long-term perspective. In short, there is an evident lack of a structured action for the planning of tourism development in Pombal, which must be participative and constructed in a bottom up, integrated and sustainable vision.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

In terms of methodology, a literature review was privileged at the first part of the study, introducing concepts and theoretical bases about tourism and collaborative planning, the Delphi Technique and the territory, to support the empirical section in which the Delphi Technique was applied.

The Delphi Technique can be described as a qualitative tool for the structuration of a coordinated communication between a group of specialists on a particular subject, which, through rounds of questionnaire intercalated by a controlled feedback, results in a set of considerations and data, based on the collective subjective judgment, that can contribute for the resolution of a complex problem (García-Melón et al., 2012; Geist, 2010; Gnatzy et al., 2011; Landeta, 2006; Listone & Turoff, 2011; Marques, 2013; Moreira, 2012; Silveira, 2016).

The application of the technique started with seventeen participants distributed in three groups: (i) political actors (six participants), (ii) agents of tourism (six participants) and (iii) agents of the territory (five participants). The members of each group of the panel were selected based on some criteria:

- Political actors: (i) Have a past or actual active role in the politics of the territory; (ii) Have a politic role with action power on tourism development; (iii) Have publicly and politically expressed their standpoints about the tourism in Pombal;

- Agents of tourism: (i) Be employed in the tourism field; (ii) Work or reside in the municipality of Pombal;

- Agents of the territory: (i) Have a relatively deep knowledge about the territory; (ii) Have basis of knowledge about tourism; (iii) Act in professional areas directly related to tourism development.

The (potential) participants were selected through purposive sampling, following the criteria, and through the snowball sampling (four participants were suggested by other experts). The first contact was made via email, telephone or in person, leading to an in person or skype (two cases) meeting to present the study and its process, the objectives and expected outputs and to clarify the role of the panel participants (Moreira, 2013; Serra et al., 2009). This phase occurred between October and November 2018.

The panel was confronted with two rounds of online (*Google Forms*) questionnaires, previously tested in a pre-round by two individuals with similar characteristics to those of the definitive panel. The first round lasted thirty-five days (from 22 December 2018 to 25 January 2019) and the second round thirty-two days (from 15 February to 18 March 2019).

Two dropouts were registered in each round, making a total of four dropouts (23.5%) in the study.

The questionnaires were formulated to address the four general objectives established:

**O1.** To define the products and resources to explore in Pombal;

**O2.** To understand the advantages and limitations for the tourism development in Pombal;

**O3.** To list a set of measures to stimulate the tourism in Pombal;

**O4.** To promote communication and debate between stakeholders.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Considering that does not exist a structured and long-term strategy for the tourism in Pombal, the panel has been asked about the relevance of formulating a strategic plan for the tourism development of Pombal: in the 1<sup>st</sup> round of questionnaires, 100% of the participants considered a relevant action and indicated, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round, until 2021 (76.9%) or 2023 (23.1%) as horizons to start the process.

It was possible to categorize a set of tourism segments by their current importance in the destination (Table 1): Strategic – basilar in the supply of the destination; Complementary – secondary product that contributes to the growth of the average stay of tourists; Emerging – product in an early stage of development with potential to grow; No expression – product without relevance in the destination. As shown in the Table 1, three segments only reached the consensus in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round and two segments did not reach consensus, being considered in two possible categories.

*Cultural Tourism* and *Sun and Sea* were evaluated as Strategic segments, a classification that is aligned with the most streamlined resources according to the panel: Pombal castle (Cultural Tourism) and Praia do Osso da Baleia (Sun and Sea). *Sports Tourism* and *Events*, both segments that are being interconnected and developed by the local government, were classified as Complementary products and can be converted into an opportunity to attract market niches. The *Adventure Tourism*, closely linked to Nature Tourism, was assumed as an Emerging segment since Pombal has attributes for the practice of BTT and pedestrianism, mountain sports (especially escalade) and others that are yet to be explored and structured. In spite of *Scientific Tourism*, *Industrial Tourism* and *Residential Tourism* having some active resources and even supply in the territory, the assessment is that the segments have no expression in the territory. Two of the segments have not reached consensus: *Nature Tourism* that, besides being a priority in the policies of the autarchy and representing quite relevant resources in the territory, lacks on a more structured supply, infrastructures and information; and *Gastronomy and Wines* because of the existence of differentiating resources but lack of investigation, presence on local restaurants and promotion of them.

**Table 1: Current importance of tourism segments in the territory**

Typology	Products/Segments	Percentage (%)
Strategic	Cultural Tourism (1)	60
	Sun and Sea (1)	60
	Nature Tourism (3)	46.2
Complementary	Sports Tourism (1)	66.7
	Events (1)	60
	Business Tourism (1)	60
	Rural Tourism (2)	61.5
	Gastronomy and Wines (3)	53.8
Emerging	Adventure Tourism (2)	69.2
	Nature Tourism (3)	53.8
No expression	Scientific Tourism (1)	73.3
	Industrial Tourism (1)	66.7
	Residential Tourism (2)	69.2
	Gastronomy and Wines (3)	46.2

(1) Results from the first round of questionnaire; (2) Results from the second round of questionnaire; (3) Segments that did not achieved consensus. Source: Almeida, 2019

Regarding the segments to explore in the future, *Nature Tourism* was the most referred considering factors as the potential and diversity of natural resources and the capacity of the segment to diversify the supply. The *Adventure Tourism*, because of the connection to Nature Tourism, *Residential Tourism*, for the localization of Pombal, and *Gastronomy and Wines*, for the existing resources that must be recognized, were pointed out by more than one participant.

Some of the most meaningful results of the study are summed in a SWOT analysis, a tool that permits a strategic and embracing analysis of the comparative and competitive elements of the destination and of the ambience in which is inserted (Fortunity & Fayos-Solà, 2016), that are divided into four pillars that approach internal (Strengths and Weaknesses) and external elements (Opportunities and Threats). In this paper only the top 3 elements of each pillar were presented (Table 2).

The *Accessibilities within the territory* (53.8%) is the top factor in terms of Strengths: in fact, the majority of the territory is interlinked by Complementary Itineraries in good conditions. The *Resources* are highlighted by their *distribution within the territory* (46.2%) and *diversity* (38.5%) since there is a variety of patrimonial niches (rural, industrial, archaeological, historical, natural, etc.) that can be explored all over the municipality. The *Awards and Certifications* (38.5%), titles that are gaining relevance

in contemporary society, can be an important element of promotion of the destination.

In terms of Weaknesses, problems of promotion are evident since *Weak promotion strategy* (69.2%) and *Lack of a strong image of the destination* (30.8%) are in the top 3 of weaknesses. There is no formal plan or strategy for the promotion of tourism in Pombal and the slogan “Pombal, from sea to mountain” is vague and does not represent a distinctive image of the destination. The *Lack of articulation between stakeholders* (38.5%) is pointed in several domains addressed in this research. As a possible solution for this matter, the creation of a discussion forum that gathers the different stakeholders was proposed with 73.3% of acceptance by the panel. The last weakness in the Top 3 reveals a basilar problem, as there is a *Weak use of the touristic potentialities of the territory* (30.8%). In fact, Pombal is an eminently industrial municipality, and the community in general, and the business and politic actors in specific, are not educated on the tourism potential in the territory.

The *Localization and accessibilities* (92.3%) stand out in terms of External Opportunities. As already pointed, Pombal is placed between Lisbon and Oporto, the biggest cities in Portugal, and is crossed by some of the most important national and regional roads as well as railways, fact that makes Pombal a territory with an interesting flow of passers-by that can be lead to

prolong their stay in the territory. Still in terms of localization, the *Proximity to UNESCO heritage* (46.2%) can be an opportunity to canalize visitants by exploring/creating cultural circuits, networks and partnerships. Finally, the *Recent highlight of Turismo Centro de Portugal* (46.2%), provided particularly by distinctions and awards and by the prioritization of digital and international promotion strategies, can bring more tourists, funds, entrepreneurs and promotion to Pombal.

In the External Challenges is possible to underline two themes. The first being issues of *Ar*

*ticulariation between Pombal and nearby municipalities* (53.8%) – Pombal is part of regional networks with some touristic emphasis that, among other causes, are not fully working because of communication problems - and with *the strategy of Turismo Centro de Portugal* (38.5%). The second challenge is the regional competitiveness, from *Nearby destination with similar products consolidated* (38.5%), such as Figueira da Foz and the Sun and Sea product or Leiria and Coimbra and the Cultural Tourism.

**Table 2: SWOT analysis for the development of tourism in Pombal**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>%</b>
Accessibilities within the territory	53.8	Weak promotion strategy of the destination	69.2
Distribution of resources within the territory	46.2	Lack of articulation and communication between stakeholders	38.5
Diversity of existent (and potential) supply	38.5	Lack of a strong and cohesive image of the destination	30.8
Awards and certifications conceded to the municipality		Weak use of the touristic potentialities of the territory	
<b>External Opportunities</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>External Challenges</b>	<b>%</b>
Localization and accessibilities	92.3	Lack of inter-municipal articulation/communication	53.8
Proximity to the UNESCO heritage hub of the Centre Region of Portugal	46.2	Weak articulation with the Turismo Centro de Portugal strategy	38.5
Recent highlight of Turismo Centro de Portugal		Nearby destinations with similar products that are consolidated	

Source: Almeida, 2019

Taking into consideration the potentialities, the current context of tourism in Pombal, the SWOT analysis and perspectives for the future, each participant proposed a set of measures for three-time horizons: short (1 year), medium (5 years) and long terms (10 years). Later, the proposals were classified as Priority, Strategic, Relevant and Less Relevant. The following measures were considered as Priority (structuring and basilar in the tourism development) or Strategic (important for the global strategy).

For the short-term (Table 3), from the fifteen proposals, eight focused the improvement of promotion and information and three the development of Natural Tourism. The *Maintenance and creation of pedestrian trails* and the *Progress in the ExploreSicó project*,

which is meant to be a gateway for the territory of Sicó with several services – interpretation centre, accommodation, cafeteria and others -, were both considered as Priority measures by the majority of the panel. Besides the *Formulation of a Tourism Strategic Plan* being only considered for the medium-term (Table 4), the *Formulation of a marketing plan for the municipality of Pombal* – that is frequently integrated in the development of a more comprehensive strategic plan - is presented for the short-term and divided the panel between being a Priority or a Strategic measure: this measure can be translated into a structured process for the implementation of a set of actions inherent to a marketing plan and that are yet to be done in Pombal – trend and SWOT analysis; market segmentation; brand



positioning; definition of distribution channels; and others (Morrison, 2013) - and are expressed in some of the measures classified

as Strategic in the short-term (for example, the *Increase of media presence*).

**Table 3: The short-term (one year) measures for the development of tourism in Pombal (%)**

Measures – One year	Priority	Strategic	Relevant	Less relevant
Maintenance and creation of pedestrian trails	53.8	30.8	15.4	-
Progress in the ExploreSicó project	46.2	23.1	23.1	7.7
Marketing plan for the municipality of Pombal	38.5	38.5	23.1	-
Increase of media presence	15.4	76.9	7.7	-
Creation of a differentiating brand/project	30.8	46.2	23.1	-
Improvement of the available touristic information	23.1	38.5	38.5	-
Development of brochure about pedestrian trails	30.8	38.5	30.8	-
Visitor Information Centre's change of location	15.4	30.8	23.1	30.8

Source: Almeida, 2019

For the horizon of Five years (Table 4), four out of eight proposals are directly oriented to planning actions. The *Formulation of a Tourism Strategic Plan* is considered as a Priority measure by 46.2% of the panel: the local autarchy has already started the process and, following the example of the last national plan (Turismo de Portugal, 2017), is integrating the perspective of the stakeholders through workshops and

meetings. Another Priority measure is the *Completion of the ExploreSicó project*, previously referred. Still in the range of planning measures, the *Formulation of a Tourism Plan for the territory of Sicó* was assessed as a Priority or Strategic measure and, in fact, this area was considered by the panel as having great touristic potential to explore and as being a differentiating element from the territory.

**Table 4: The medium-term (five years) measures for the development of tourism in Pombal (%)**

Measures – Five years	Priority	Strategic	Relevant	Less relevant
Formulation of a Tourism Strategic Plan for the municipality of Pombal	46.2	38.5	15.4	-
Completion of the ExploreSicó project	46.2	23.1	30.8	-
Formulation of a Tourism Plan of Sicó	46.2	46.2	7.7	-
Development of strategies for the promotion of local artisans and artists	23.1	46.2	30.8	-

Source: Almeida, 2019

In a long-term (ten years), the focus is the revitalisation and implementation of more bureaucratic and detailed projects associated with sensitive and complex resources (Table 5). Of eight suggestions, two were considered as Priority: the *Characterization and promotion of the territory of Sicó* and the *Touristic dynamize-*

*tion of Mata Nacional do Urso (MNU) – Sicó and MNU* (in which the Praia do Osso da Baleia can be included) were considered as the natural resources with most potential in terms of tourism exploitation by the panel, nevertheless, limitations associated to concerns about management and conservation have been restricting the

development of products. It should be highlighted that the *Monitoring of the Strategic Plan of Tourism in Pombal*, which is supposed to be

implemented in five years (Table 4), was considered as a Strategic measure by 53.8% of the panel.

**Table 5: The long-term (ten years) for the development of tourism in Pombal (%)**

Measures – Ten years	Priority	Strategic	Relevant	Less relevant
Characterization and promotion of the territory of Sicó	53.8	46.2	-	-
Touristic revitalisation of Mata Nacional do Urso	38.5	30.8	30.8	-
Development of the Aldeias de Calcário (Limestone Villages) network	30.8	53.8	15.4	-
Touristic exploration of paleontological heritage	15.4	53.8	23.1	7.7
Monitoring of the Strategic Plan of Tourism in Pombal	23.1	53.8	23.1	7.7
Creation of an institutional website of the destination	15.4	53.8	23.1	7.7
Growth in the accommodation's sphere	7.7	61.5	23.1	7.7
Touristic revitalisation of Aldeia do Vale	15.4	38.5	38.5	7.7

Source: Almeida, 2019

## 6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Pombal is an eminently industrial municipality with a strong rural mentality. In this context, tourism has not been a political and economic priority in the territory until now, which is translated into a lack of planning actions and articulation between stakeholders.

In the specific case of Pombal, the application of the Delphi Technique, through questionnaires that secure the anonymity and the sharing of perspectives, allowed the integration of different groups of local stakeholders, some of them traditionally disregarded in planning actions, in the process and instigated the communication between them, which was one of the objectives of the study (O4).

Taking into consideration the endogenous resources, it was possible to determine the importance of a set of tourism products in the territory (O1), from strategic (Cultural Tourism and Sun and Sea) to complementary (Sports Tourism, Events, Business Tourism and Rural Tourism) or emerging (Adventure Tourism). Nature Tourism is identified as the main segment to explore in the future.

As for the advantages and limitations for the development of tourism in Pombal (O2), the territory has strong comparative elements (specially, the localization and the diversity and dispersion of resources in the territory) but serious fragilities in terms of competitive elements (namely, the lack of a strong and cohesive image of the destination, the low investment in

tourism, the problems of articulation between actors and the gaps in terms of promotion).

With the existent resources, advantages and limitations in mind, a set of measures were presented (O3) for three time horizons, being possible to identify acting priorities in each one: for the short-term (one year), the focus is on promotion and nature tourism; the necessity of planning measures is stated in the medium-term (five years); and projects for resources with great potential, but also with limitations associated to bureaucracy, preservation of habitats and funds, are considered in the long-term (ten years).

The importance of the formulation of a tourism strategy for the long-term (translated in a plan) is stated as a priority for the sustainable and structured development of tourism in Pombal.

On a broader perspective, the case study demonstrates that the Delphi Technique is a mechanism that allows to cover the main elements of a tourism plan – diagnostic section (SWOT Analysis), priority segments, operational actions and others (Silva & Umbelino, 2017) – while pursuing a collaborative approach.

Following that, the study presents the Delphi Technique as a privileged tool for the engagement of stakeholders in the planning process (Del Chiappa et al., 2018), by limiting some of the main issues of a collaborative proceeding – power hierarchies and social pressures, geographical and temporal barriers, depth and level

of reflection of the contributions and solutions generated, and others – and contributing for the construction of a more equitable communication approach. In fact, the six propositions for a successful collaborative approach listed by Jamal and Getz (1995) are present in the empirical investigation: the sense of complementarity and interdependence between stakeholders is highlighted by the inclusion of different kinds of contributors from different groups of stakeholders (Soulard et al., 2018); the individual meeting enabled the participants to recognize individual and general benefits from their involvement in the process; the fact that representatives of local autarchies participated in the investigation and that the results were publicly presented gave the perception that decisions will be effectively implemented; the selection of the panel enabled to include several groups of stakeholders in the procedure; the existence of a (group of) researcher(s) that is/are responsible for the initiation, facilitation and control of the interactions is inherent to the application of the technique; and, lastly, through the search for the consensus, the technique allowed to formulate

common and/or negotiated visions, objectives and goals.

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has two major limitations that must be addressed. The first one is the lack of representation of the perspective of the demand in the Delphi Panel and in the approached themes. The second limitation results of the inherent characteristics of the chosen technique and of the diminished size of the panel, which exclude the possibility of considering the results as representative of a sample of the universe.

Regarding future research, this methodology can be replicated in other destinations, especially in those where tourism is in an initial point of exploration and where problems of articulation and promotion of communication between stakeholders exist. We recommend the application of mixed techniques to support the results and, if possible, the integration of representatives of the demand in the Delphi panel.

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